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George Will

If Only Reagan Could Run Alone

The sun is blinding, the smog is irritating, the humidity is drenching and William Casey, blinking like a large grandfatherly gopher, is wondering whether living here is too high a price to pay to rescue the republic from Jimmy Carter.

Actually, the scene of Casey's suffering is in Northern Virginia, just south of the Pentagon. Some of Northern Virginia is green and serene, but Reagan's GHQ is cheek-by-jowl with howling freeways. "Why here?" I gasp to Reagan's campaign director. Because, Casey says, it is close to airports. Besides, if located in downtown Washington, the campaign would have been forever shelling out parking expenses, \$4.50 a day per car. Casey mentions that cost with the tone usually heard from Americans who have just priced a croissant in one of Paris' better hotels.

Casey, 67, is no stranger to Washington summers, having been an undersecretary of state and head of the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Export-Import Bank. He is a man of many parts, and many seasons. The phrase "old shoe" does not do justice to his lack of pretense and air of rumpledness. The phrase "upward mobility" is altogether too pallid to describe his career.

Born in New York to parents of modest means, educated at Fordham and St. John's law school, by 1944 he was in London running the OSS (the predecessor of the CIA) program putting agents into Germany. A roommate was Richard Helms. He has made several fortunes as a lawyer, entrepreneur and author (mostly of books on business and finance, but also a fine volume on American Revolution battles).

Casey rejects the idea that the electorate is beside itself with despair about the Reagan-Carter choice. Reagan, he insists, has the largest national base of any Republican since Eisenhower, and Reagan's base is even more intense than Eisenhower's was.

An unpublished poll shows that what has generally been true for other presidents is basically true for Reagan: he should, if he could, run alone. Gerald Ford is the only suggested running mate who raises Reagan's support, and Ford raises it by only 2 percent, which is negligible. Everyone else lowers Reagan's support slightly. These findings are unhelpful in that they do not point to anyone, but are helpful in that they leave Reagan free to weigh three options involving what are said to be the Big Eight under consideration.

The Baker-or-Bush Option. These two are perceived, mistakenly but perhaps usefully, as being significantly less conservative than Reagan. Republicans assume that John Anderson will be pulled (not that it will take much pulling) to the left, where the sources of his money are. But there is ominous, if tentative, evidence that Anderson can hurt Reagan. For example, a

Texas poll shows Anderson taking three votes from Reagan for every two votes he takes from Carter. Baker or Bush would be insurance against Anderson.

The Lugar Option. Because Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana has no enemies, he is the closest thing to running alone. But some Reaganites say Lugar is not the best man to fill the Lugar Option. They prefer Donald Rumsfeld, former just-about-everything (congressman, ambassador to NATO, White House chief of staff, secretary of defense, etc.), whose résumé puts even Bush's to shame, and who is from the glorious and indispensable Great State (Illinois). A convincing case can also be made for the congressman who has done most to make the Democrats' control of Congress a national issue, a congressman who may be the best speaker among the Big Eight and who could help Reagan carry a state Jerry Ford carried as a favorite son: Guy Vander Jagt of Michigan.

Finally, there is the What-the-Heil-Let's-Go-for-Broke Option. Ford has stressed to Reagan that it will take at least three Republican terms to turn the country around. Reagan may say: I can beat Carter all by my lonesome, with no help from my running mate, so I'll pick a soul mate, someone young, smart and tough enough to carry 90-proof Reaganism into the 1990s: Sen. Paul Laxalt of Nevada. Rep. Jack Kemp of New York. Or William Simon, the former Treasury secretary who is well equipped to help Reagan stress the bread-and-butter issue: the price of bread and butter. An unpublished poll indicates that Simon—in part, because of his book "A Time for Truth"—has a remarkably high recognition, nationwide.

My pick? We "Dallas" fans aren't picking until we hear a hospital bulletin on the recovery of J. R. Ewing.